

***The Characterization of Mary Tudor: An Analysis of Historiography and Popular Culture***

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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## Abstract

Mary Tudor, the first successful female ruler of England, possesses a negative historical reputation, due to the historiography of the last four centuries. However, modern historians have begun to reevaluate her historiography, revealing the inaccuracies and biases that have led to her negative depiction. In this paper, I seek to analyze Mary's historical image, and how it has recently become an interest for scholars. Firstly, I analyze her historiography, and its changes, or lack thereof, since her death. Secondly, I look at three depictions of Mary in popular culture: Thomas Heywood's *If you know not me you know nobody part I*, Alfred Tennyson Tennyson's *Queen Mary*, and Philippa Gregory's *The Queen's Fool*, and how these cultural depictions influence and are influenced by her historiography. Through this analysis, I reflect on why Mary's historiography became tainted, and how this affected how history perceives her.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Tara Wood, for advising me on this project. Her advice and assistance throughout this project has made me a better writer and overall scholar.

## Project Analysis Essay

When doing this research, I first read several biographies on Mary Tudor. This was necessary in order to get a basic idea of Mary's life and her major failures and achievements. This also allowed me to see how different authors tackled the same subject matter. I used this information to write the biographical section about Mary. Then, I moved on to the historiographical research. This involved analyzing how historians had written about Mary, both in the past and today. I chose to focus mainly on those who fell on either side of the spectrum, those that vilified her verses the revisionists. Finally, I chose three works of fiction in different time periods to analyze her popular culture depiction. With each work, I analyzed the text using the knowledge I had gained during the historiography research. I also gathered some information on each time period, specifically their gendered politics. This allowed me to compare each text to each other and see how the historiography and popular culture depictions aligned.

When conducting the research for my thesis, I expanded my knowledge in historical thinking. Specifically, my thesis emphasized to me the questionable nature of historiography, and the importance of looking at any potential biases in a source, even a credible one. This is due to the many variety of sources I found on my subject, Mary Tudor. The sources varied in content based on the time period and author, suggesting that most historiography is not completely about the accurate depiction of facts. Instead, many histories are colored by contemporary biases and the distortion of truth over time. However, the research I conducted on my thesis has shown me that, although credible historical sources may not always be accurate and unbiased, they can still be incredible useful, both to the subject they cover and to the history of their own time period. For example, many of the biographies I read on Mary Tudor taught me less about Mary Tudor than they taught me about the views of society during that time period.

Additionally, the above knowledge I gain through this thesis also emphasized to me the importance of gathering a variety of sources. It can be tempting when doing historical research to rely on one author, or even multiple authors from one time period. However, this thesis has highlighted to me how these sources can be colored by contemporary issues or opinions. Therefore, in order to understand every aspect of a subject, it is likely better to choose a large variety of sources in order to insure the subject is being approached and studied from each angle.

Ultimately, this thesis increased my confidence in my own ability to research and gauge sources. I think many students are skeptical of their own knowledge, and over-rely on expert sources. This thesis has encouraged me to challenge credible sources and form my own educated opinions.



Mary Tudor's birth occurred on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of February, 1516, to King Henry VIII of England and his wife, Katherine of Aragon. The country celebrated her birth spectacularly, despite the disappointment of her sex. Her parents' marriage had failed to produce a living heir in the six years previous. In 1519, due to a French betrothal treaty, Henry officially declared Mary his heir. However, few expected her to succeed as queen<sup>1</sup>. The question of succession and Mary's role in it would haunt her for the rest of her life, influencing her privileged upbringing, resulting in her social ostracism after the schism with her father, and complicating her tumultuous battle for the throne. Mary's life and reign have recently emerged as an area for reevaluation by scholars who are now providing a more nuanced, less negative picture of her reign. When examined through the context of the time period and her previous life experiences, a more sympathetic depiction of Mary's reign appears. Biographical information about Mary, especially her years of hardship, help to justify her motivations and behavior, as well as explain her negative portrayal throughout the last four centuries.

Until the decline of her parents' marriage in the late 1520s, Mary lived in the manner of a typical Renaissance princess. She was given a royal household, bestowed titles befitting the daughter of a king, and educated to be the wife of a ruler. As befitting her title of princess, her parents considered several political marriages for her, with the male heirs of France, Scotland, and Spain respectively. However, Mary's status as her father's sole heir complicated her upbringing. Due to the country's experience with crippling dynastic wars just a generation previous, Henry possessed a strong desire to settle the question of succession in the hope of

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<sup>1</sup>Anna Whitelock, *Mary Tudor: England's First Queen*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), 7-18.



securing a peaceful transition. A female heir created many political issues, as it was assumed whomever she married would be the actual ruler. As historian David Loades argues,

“If she married the ruler of another kingdom, or his heir, the independence of England would be compromised, and this was something with neither Henry nor his subjects wanted. If she married within the realm, as had once or twice been hinted, not only would it be a disparagement, but factional strife would have been a serious risk. Only a union with a cadet of one of the major royal families could have satisfied both honour and security to some extent.<sup>2</sup>”

By 1527, Katherine was unlikely to produce another heir, and Henry began looking at other options to ensure peaceful succession. Henry’s “Great Matter” consumed England for the next seven years, during which Henry pursued an annulment, separated from the Roman Catholic Church, and married his second wife, Anne Boleyn. Mary’s life changed dramatically during this time, as she went from heir presumptive to a royal bastard. These years of hardship likely molded Mary’s views on government and religion, views that heavily affected her actions as queen.

Before the dissolution of their marriage, Mary’s relationship with her parents was one of genuine fondness, and she “probably had more attention and affection from both her parents than was common with royal or aristocratic children of the period.<sup>3</sup>” Both her parents involved themselves heavily in her education and the running of her household, although she visited court infrequently. However, this close relationship became strained during the King’s Great Matter. By 1533, Henry proclaimed Katherine as the Dowager Princess of Wales, stating that her marriage to Henry was never valid due to her previous marriage to his brother, Arthur. The following year, 1534, a law that proclaimed Katherine had never been the legitimate wife of

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<sup>2</sup> David Loades. *Mary Tudor: A Life*. (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989). 37.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, 35

Henry carried with it the implication that Mary had never been his legitimate daughter. From this point forward, she would be referred to as the King's bastard daughter, the Lady Mary.

From 1533 to 1536, Mary was subjected to isolation and humiliation due to her demoted status. Mary refused to acknowledge the illegitimacy of her parents' marriage or her father's supremacy of the Church of England, and the King denied her contact with her mother. Mary became a member of the baby Princess Elizabeth's household, completing Mary's demotion to bastard. The isolation, humiliation, and psychological pressure of this time seems to have impacted Mary greatly, even to the point of causing physical illness<sup>4</sup>. By June 1536, with the threat of arrest for treason from members of the court, Mary submitted to her father's authority. On June 22nd, she signed a series of articles acknowledging Henry as head of the church and declaring his marriage to Katherine illegitimate. This apparently caused her much internal grief, as she requested a dispensation from the pope for the acts. However, her submission mended the rift between her and Henry, opening the royal court to her and improving her quality of life dramatically.

For the next eleven years, Mary lived as the "dear and well-beloved" daughter of the king. A frequent visitor at court, Mary was second only to the king's wife, and became a friend and confidant of Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, and Katherine Parr, the king's third, fourth, and sixth wives. Despite a marked improvement in her quality of living, Mary suffered from periodic illnesses and her continued diminished status, as Henry neglected to immediately restore her to the succession or give her legitimacy. Her questionable role in the succession continued to

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<sup>4</sup> Judith Richards. *Mary Tudor*. (New York: Routledge, 2008). 55-57

<sup>5</sup> Loades. *Mary Tudor: A Life*. 100-103



halt any marriage negotiations, just as it had during her childhood. She lamented this fact, declaring herself “the most unhappy lady in Christendom.”<sup>6</sup> However, generally the years between her mother’s death and the death of her father were peaceful and prosperous. When Henry died on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, 1547, his will declared her second in the line of succession, after her half-brother Edward, although it did not restore her legitimacy<sup>7</sup>. Henry’s death put an end to Mary’s peaceful life at court, as her new role as heir to the throne made her a dangerous political figure to Edward’s government.

During the Edwardian years, Mary rarely visited court, and her household became a symbol of political resistance against the crown, particularly for religious reasons. In the eyes of many Catholic nations, and the papacy itself, Edward’s rule was illegitimate, and Mary the rightful heir to the throne.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, Mary gained great financial independence and power after the death of her father, as he granted her many estates in his will, leading her to become a significant regional magnate, particularly in Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex<sup>9</sup>. These issues made her a dangerous opposing political force to Edward’s government, as many members worried rebellions could be formed around her, or that her religious actions would undermine the Crown’s authority. Mary remained a focus for discontent and Edward’s government continuously pressured her to submit to Protestantism. Her recalcitrance in this led Edward to alter the succession, skipping both Mary and Elizabeth to give the throne to Jane Grey. After

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<sup>6</sup> Richards. *Mary Tudor*. 81.

<sup>7</sup> Whitelock. *Mary Tudor: England’s First Queen*. 119.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-135.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Whitelock and Diarmaid MacCulloch. “Princess Mary’s Household and the Succession Crisis, July 1553,” *The Historical Journal*, vol. 50, no. 2 (2007) : pp. 265–287.



Edward's death on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, 1553, Jane was proclaimed Queen of England in London, as Mary gathered her supporters and prepared to fight for the throne<sup>10</sup>.

Some supporters, such as Thomas Wentworth, mobilized for Mary due to the legitimacy of her claim, acknowledging Mary as Henry's legitimate daughter who therefore possessed, under the inheritance laws of England, a stronger claim than Jane. Other supporters, such as Edward Hastings, supported Catholicism and sided with Mary over the Protestant Jane Grey. Finally, Mary possessed a strong support system within her household, loyal to her personally, including men such as Robert Rochester, who had served her faithfully and at personal risk during the tense years under Edward<sup>11</sup>. On the twelfth of July, Mary's forces were organized enough to begin moving, and she traveled to Framlingham and sent messengers to other towns. In many instances, popular support for Mary convinced the town authorities to declare for her.<sup>12</sup> As Mary's forces swelled, became better organized, and began to move towards London, Jane's government began to waver.

With Jane's strongest supporter, the duke of Northumberland, out of London mobilizing troops, the rest of Jane's government began to break down. On the thirteenth of July, many members of the privy council, including the earls of Bedford, Arundel, Shrewsbury, and Pembroke, revealed themselves as sympathetic to Mary's cause. They consulted with Imperial ambassadors, who assured them that Emperor Charles had no intention of encouraging Mary to alter the religious laws of the land or marry a foreigner, all of which had been the major fears of

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<sup>10</sup> Loades. *Mary Tudor: A Life*. 171-175.

<sup>11</sup> Whitelock & Macculloch, *Princess Mary's Household and the Succession Crisis, July 1553*.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Whitelock. *Mary Tudor: Princess, Bastard, Queen*. (New York: Random House Publishing, 2009). 180.

Jane's supporters. By the nineteenth of July, most of the council declared for Mary, having been convinced by her rising support and by assurances from the Imperial ambassadors that Emperor Charles had no intention of using Mary to interfere in England<sup>13</sup>. Without the support of London or the hope of reinforcements, Northumberland surrendered and acknowledged Mary as queen. Mary's coup succeeded, without any battles or foreign aid. Instead, it was the legitimacy of her claim and her popularity that led the English to support her. Mary entered the city of London on August 3, 1553, where she began her reign as England's first queen<sup>14</sup>.

Mary's first days as queen were busy, as she set the precedents for a queen regent at her coronation, formed her council, and dealt with the remains of Jane's government. Her first Parliament session took place on October third, and settled several important political matters, including restoring her legitimacy and repealing the religious laws passed during Edward's reign. However, Mary's parliament was anxious to settle another outstanding issue, her marital status. As Mary was England's first female monarch, there was no established historical precedent for how she would rule, and whether all her land would go to her husband upon marriage, as was typical of English marriages at this time. Despite the uncertainty, it was generally believed Mary must be married, and quickly, as "it is important that she have heirs, and still more important that someone may be at her side to assist her in the conduct of her affairs.<sup>15</sup>" However, the same issues that prevented marriage treaties during her childhood caused issues now. An English marriage was never truly considered, as it would likely lead England into factional strife, due to a lack of suitable candidates. However, a foreign marriage

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<sup>13</sup> Loades. *Mary Tudor: A Life*. 178-179.

<sup>14</sup> Whitelock. *Mary Tudor: Princess, Bastard, Queen*. 187-191.

<sup>15</sup> Richards. *Mary Tudor*. 142.



was also unpopular, as it was believed that a foreign king would place his own men in high offices over English men, and due to a fear of England being pulled into foreign affairs. Despite the general English hesitancy over a foreign marriage, Mary settled quickly on the Emperor's son, Philip of Spain.

Mary's marriage to Philip caused continuous controversy within her government. Issues regarding the marriage included Philip's official role within the government, his influence over Mary, and his country's conflicts with France. Despite Philip's lack of official power within the realm and his inability to deploy troops or appoint offices, many felt he wielded too much power merely through his influence over the queen<sup>16</sup>. For Mary, the most important aspect of this marriage was likely the production of an heir, to secure continued Tudor succession. An heir was also necessary to keep her half-sister and presumed heir, Elizabeth, off the throne, due to her suspected Protestant sympathies. However, Mary's age, poor health, and Philip's frequent absences led many to doubt the likelihood of a successful pregnancy. In 1554, Mary showed signs of pregnancy, but when no baby appeared by July of 1555, it became clear this was a false pregnancy. In 1556, Mary reported a second false pregnancy and hope for an heir diminished further <sup>17</sup>.

The failure to produce an heir placed further attention on Mary's half-sister, Elizabeth, the next in the line of succession under their father's will. Despite Elizabeth's legal status as heir, Mary sought several times to change the succession in favor of other relatives, including Mary, Queen of Scots, and Margaret Douglas, both Catholic. The relationship between the two

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<sup>16</sup> Whitelock. *Mary Tudor: Princess, Bastard, Queen*. 243-245.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*,. 272-279.



sisters was often strained, due to the circumstances of Elizabeth's birth, their large age gap, and their differences in religious beliefs. Elizabeth's status as a popular figure with Protestant sympathizers and rebels, who wished to overthrow Mary's government and instill Elizabeth as queen, further heightened tensions<sup>18</sup>. By the time of her final illness in 1558, both Philip and the English Parliament convinced Mary that there was no legal justification to exclude Elizabeth from the succession, and although Mary never explicitly named an heir in her will, Elizabeth was accepted as the rightful heir<sup>19</sup>.

The pressure for Mary to produce an heir, and her reluctance to name Elizabeth, stemmed mostly from the fear that the restoration of Catholicism taking place under Mary would be reversed under Elizabeth. Mary began moving the country back towards Catholicism as early as her first Parliament session, which repealed all the religious legislation passed under her brother, Edward<sup>20</sup>. Mary's religious restoration is commonly equated with the burning of heretics. Widely accepted as the appropriate punishment for such a serious crime, the burning of heretics was considered necessary to cleanse the country of its sins and discourage the spread heresy. The burnings also seemed necessary to prove the strength of the government, as ignoring open defiance of the law would have made the government appear as if they could not perform their duties<sup>21</sup>. The excessive Marian burnings may have been exacerbated by negative events during Mary's reign, such as her false pregnancies and military defeats, which

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<sup>18</sup> Loades, David. *Mary Tudor: A Life*. 283.

<sup>19</sup> Richards. *Mary Tudor*. 224.

<sup>20</sup> Whitelock. *Mary Tudor: Princess, Bastard, Queen*. 212.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas S. Freeman. "Burning Zeal: Mary Tudor and the Marian Persecution." *Mary Tudor: Old and New Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Doran and Thomas Freeman. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). 203-204.

were interpreted by Mary as God's punishment for allowing heresy in her realm. Mary's restoration declared Protestantism, the former law of the land, as heresy, and as a result two hundred and eighty-five citizens burned between 1555 and 1558<sup>22</sup>.

In her five years as Queen of England, Mary worked to restore Catholicism within England, formed a political alliance with Spain through her marriage, and engaged in a war with France. These policies were brought to a halt in November 1558, when Mary succumb to illness and died at the age of forty-two. Upon her death, her sister Elizabeth succeeded, and ignored or overturned most of Mary's policies. Although Mary remains famous for the excessive burnings that took place during her reign and the loss of Calais, her reign also marked the first successful succession of a female monarch in England, and set a precedent for female rule that guided many subsequent queens.

In the four centuries after Mary's death, historians continued to describe her reign negatively, labeling her as inept, cruel, hysterical, and woefully ineffective. These negative views of Mary began as early as Elizabeth's reign, as Elizabeth's ministers "bolstered the legitimacy of her reign by continual reference to the weakness, poverty, and false religion of Mary's reign<sup>23</sup>." Late sixteenth century historians, such as Abraham Fleming and John Foxe, condemned Mary for her persistence in the "false religion" and for the bloodshed of Protestant martyrs under her reign. Others downplayed her role in the burnings, such as Richard Grafton, author of the 1562 *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England*, and instead emphasized the queen's supposed weakness and inability to rule. These judgments about Mary's reign changed

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<sup>22</sup> Richards. *Mary Tudor*. 192-195.

<sup>23</sup> Susan Doran and Thomas Freeman. *Mary Tudor: Old and New Perspectives* .(New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). 9.



little in the subsequent centuries, and the study of her reign was often passed over in favor of her father's or sister's. However, by the 1970s, historians delved deeper into Mary's life. Although some still found Mary to be a weak or ineffective ruler, others developed a more sympathetic picture of the first female ruler of England, seeking to revitalize her image within the historical community.

In the 1970s several Tudor historians began to reevaluate Mary's reign. Ignoring the propaganda of the Elizabethan period, these historians published evidence of a more successful monarch. Jennifer Loach and R.H. Pogson both argued that, far from being alienated from her subjects and officials, Mary's restoration of Catholicism represented a broad consensus throughout the country, and that her Parliament worked with her effectively<sup>24</sup>. In 1983, historian Robert Tittler published *The Reign of Mary I*, which summarized the newly-formed revisionist view of the period. The revisionists theorized that Mary's reign was neither fruitless nor ineffective, but rather flourishing, and would have continued successfully if not for circumstances beyond Mary's control. While acknowledging mistakes such as the loss of Calais and the Spanish marriage, Tittler argued Mary's reign was supported by the nobility and labels the restoration of the Catholic Church as a success. He blames Mary's ultimate failures not on her personality or ability to govern, but on the natural disasters of her reign and her early death<sup>25</sup>. These new versions of Marian historiography portrayed a more positive image of the queen, and encouraged other scholars to investigate further into the queen's life and legacy

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<sup>24</sup> David Loades, "The Reign of Mary Tudor: Historiography and Research," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 21, no. 4 ( 1989) : 547-558, accessed April 19, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4049536.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 555.



More recently, historians such as Judith Richards sought to counteract the issues present in Mary's historiography, namely sexism. With her 2008 biography *Mary Tudor*, Richards emphasizes how Mary's modern image was shaped by negative opinions written centuries ago. By highlighting Mary's humanist education and citing her many accomplishments as ruler, Richards attempts to fight the sexist notion that Mary was at fault for every negative aspect of her reign, and not responsible for any of its achievements. Using a more gendered analysis, Richards evaluates how Mary's sex affected her reign, and worked to eliminate sexist historical portrayals, such as the weak or over-sexual woman. Unlike some revisionists, Richards does not shy away from Mary's "bloody" image. Instead, Richards tackles the Marian burnings head-on, acknowledging the horrors of the executions and Mary's leadership role in them. However, far from condemning Mary as a violent ruler, Richards emphasizes the legality of the executions, and how Mary is not the only figure responsible for the burnings, as the blame is shared among her entire government who supported the legislation<sup>26</sup>. Other historians continue with this theme of appropriate executions, pointing out Elizabeth's government executed many more subjects as "traitors" for practicing Catholicism, and therefore rejecting the idea that the Marian burnings were excessive or unusual. Like many revisionists, Richards ultimately depicts Mary as a competent ruler who gains an unfair portrayal throughout history due to her sex and religion.

Other modern historians reject the revisionist argument of a flourishing Marian England. Historian David Loades' studies of Mary date back to the 1950s, and in his 1989 biography *Mary Tudor: A Life* he presents an accomplished Renaissance princess who is unable to overcome the

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<sup>26</sup> Richards. *Mary Tudor*

immense difficulties of ruling. Although acknowledging her achievements, Loades ultimately blames the failures of the reign on Mary herself, citing her as hopelessly unfit, lacking a leadership style, naïve, indecisive, hysterical, and, above all, dependent upon others, including the Emperor and her husband<sup>27</sup>. Unlike Richards, Loades rejects a gendered analysis of Mary's reign by refusing to acknowledge how her gender may have played a role in the effectiveness of her reign or in the accuracy of her historiography. However, Loades finds a middle ground between the condemnations of the seventeenth century Protestant historians and the sympathetic depictions of the modern revisionists. Other historians also supported this middle ground approach. Historian Eric Ives claimed Mary was naïve, lacked self-confidence, and described her reign as "the most inglorious in English history", but agreed that Mary was "not the total disaster which extreme Protestant propaganda portrayed."<sup>28</sup> Ultimately, these scholarly arguments regarding the successes and failures of Mary's reign, and the issues with her previous historiography, highlight the various ways Mary's reign can be depicted.

Modern historians continue to develop new theories and debates regarding the reign of Mary Tudor. Some of the most controversial issues of her reign include how large a role she possessed in the running of her government, the extent of Philip's role in her government, and the effectiveness of her religious policies. These remain the current issues largely because they are the issues for which past historians condemned her, her inability to lead, her relations with Spain, and her Catholicism. For these sins, past historians portrayed Mary as weak, hysterical, and cruel. These portrayals of Mary exist not only in historical accounts, but also in the popular

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<sup>27</sup> Loades. *Mary Tudor: A Life*

<sup>28</sup> Doran & Freeman. *Mary Tudor: Old and New Perspectives*. 14.



culture of the subsequent five centuries. According to historian Judith Richards, “Any more nuanced view of Mary’s reign simply could not compete with, for example, the vicarious thrills of reading the nineteenth-century version of John Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs’...so it is not surprising that Foxe’s ‘Martyrs’ remained potent in popular imagination...and was frequently invoked by fiction writers...<sup>29</sup>” The cruelty and weakness of Mary depicted in her historiography up until the twentieth century inspired similarly negative depictions of her in fictional plays and texts, and further impacted the way history perceived her reign.

Mary appeared as a character in several plays during and immediately following the Elizabethan Age, including *Sir Thomas Wyatt* by Dekker and Webster, published in 1607, and Samuel Rowley’s 1605 *When you see me you know me*, although she is a minor character. In his 1605 play, *If you know not me you know nobody part I*, Thomas Heywood grants Mary a major role, leading to a more fully developed character than in other fictional works and showcasing a seventeenth-century opinion of Mary. Heywood portrays Mary as the hot-headed and cruel sister of Elizabeth, the tragic heroine of the play. Heywood’s interpretation of Mary reflects her historiography of the time, that she was a weak ruler whose Catholic policies and cruel personal behavior tainted her reign.

Heywood’s interpretation of Mary as a cruel ruler stems mostly from her interactions with her Protestant citizens, including her sister Elizabeth. This depiction matches the historiography of the time period, which condemned Mary for her Catholic policies. Mary’s anti-Protestant sentiments are shown from her first scene, in which a citizen says to her, “A general

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<sup>29</sup> Judith Richards. “Reassessing Mary Tudor: Some Concluding Points.” *Mary Tudor: Old and New Perspectives*. Ed. Susan Doran and Thomas Freeman. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). 207.



fruit when we first flockt to you, And made first head with you at Fromagham, Twas thus concluded that we your liegemen Should still enjoy our confessions, and vfe that faith Which in king Edwards daies was held Canonically.<sup>30</sup>” He emphasizes that citizens like him helped Mary gain her throne, and in return they requested tolerance to practice their Protestant faith. Mary’s reacts with anger to this request and arrests the citizen, saying “They shall know, To whome their faithfull duties they doe owe, Since they the lymbes, the head would feeke to fwary, Before they gouerne, they shall learne t’obay.<sup>31</sup>” This response characterizes her to the audience as unreasonable and ungrateful, and also emphasizes that Mary does not understand or respect her citizens, who want religious toleration. This directly supports the Protestant historiography of Mary, that restoring Catholicism was an unpopular policy forced upon the people by their demanding queen. In addition to this scene, Heywood utilizes Mary’s interactions with Elizabeth to highlight the differences between the cruel, Catholic queen and the suffering, Protestant princess.

At the beginning of Heywood’s play, Mary’s character orders the arrest of her sister, Elizabeth, at the urging of her advisors, who believe Elizabeth guilty of plotting with revolting citizens, although they cite no evidence. Heywood highlights the injustice of this action by emphasizing the suffering of Elizabeth due to Mary’s orders. When Mary’s officials arrive to escort Elizabeth to the Tower of London, they find her in poor health, and her doctors suggest the journey could be perilous for her. However, Elizabeth insists on returning to London, saying “The Queene is kind, and we will ftrive with death To tender her our life, We are her fubiect,

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Heywood. *If you know not me, you know nobody part I*. (London: Oxford University Press: 1935). Scene ii. Lines 81-85.

<sup>31</sup> Heywood. *If you know not me, you know nobody, part I*. scene ii, lines 87-90.

and obey her heft...<sup>32</sup>” In this scene, Heywood depicts Elizabeth as a loyal subject, willing to sacrifice herself despite her sister’s unjust demands. When Elizabeth arrives at the Tower, her jailor treats her poorly, and justifies his behavior by saying “The Queene commands, and Ile obey her will...<sup>33</sup>”, blaming Mary for Elizabeth’s suffering. This further promotes Mary’s negative image, as the audience now views her as a bully and Elizabeth as her victim.

In addition to her unfair treatment of Elizabeth, Heywood depicts Mary negatively by making her the sole villain of the play. Unlike more revisionist portrayals of Mary, Heywood focuses the blame for the mistakes of Mary’s reign solely on the monarch herself. Heywood highlights this through the many characters in the play who attempt to intercede on the victims’ behalf and prevent Mary’s cruel behavior, often to no avail. For example, in scene two of the play, one of Mary’s officials attempts to defend Elizabeth and suggests that she should not be arrested. To this Mary responds, “Away with him, ile teach him know his place, To frowne when we frowne, smile on whome we grace.<sup>34</sup>” This line not only depicts Mary as a megalomaniac, but also shifts the blame of Elizabeth’s poor treatment from Mary’s governmental officials to Mary herself. Another key character, Philip of Spain, also attempts to defend Elizabeth from Mary’s wrath. He tells Mary, “But royall Queene, yet for her vertues fake, Deeme her offences, if she haue offended, With all the lenitie a Sister can.<sup>35</sup>” Later in the play, he continues his defense, saying “Looke on your sister with a smiling brow, And if her fault merite not too much hate, Let her be cenfur’d with all lenity, Let your deepe hatred end where

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<sup>32</sup> Heywood. *If you know not me, you know nobody part I*. scene vi. lines 232-234.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., scene viii, line 626.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., scene ii, lines 122-123.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., scene iv, lines 298-300.



it began, She hath binne too long banished from the fun.<sup>36</sup> By choosing Philip as one of Elizabeth's main defenders, Heywood further emphasizes Mary's negative image. In Heywood's play, even Philip, a foreign Catholic king whom the majority of the country disapproves of, realizes the virtues of Elizabeth and the cruelty of Mary's behavior. Through these scenes, Heywood emphasizes that the blame for Elizabeth's suffering falls on Mary alone, further blemishing her historical reputation. Furthermore, when Mary relents and removes Elizabeth from the Tower, she does so only at Philip's urging, meaning that any credit for Elizabeth's restoration is given not to Mary, but to Philip. Therefore, Heywood creates a characterization of Mary that emphasizes to the audience her inept policies and personal vendettas, both of which contribute to her poor leadership.

Heywood's play, *If you know not me you know nobody*, reflects the popularized anti-Marian historiography of the seventeenth century. After the prosperity of the Elizabethan Age, these historians were quick to critique what they saw as the ills of Mary's reign, namely her anti-Protestant policies. Heywood reflects this idea by comparing Mary and Elizabeth. When Mary acts harshly and unjustly, Elizabeth responds with loyalty and strength, further vilifying Mary's character in comparison. Heywood's interpretation of the two sisters reflects a winner-takes-all approach to history. Elizabeth's rule was marked by longevity and prosperity, while Mary's policies were short-lived and unpopular with her successor's contemporaries. In addition, Elizabeth's religion, Protestantism, becomes the dominant religion in England and continues long after her reign, while Mary's Catholic policies failed and the country's anti-Catholicism views deepened. Therefore, Mary's perceived losses led to a negative

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<sup>36</sup> Heywood, *If you know not me you know nobody* part I. scene xviii, lines 1234-1238.



historiography that encouraged a negative portrayal in the popular culture of the seventeenth century.

Interestingly, Heywood's play lacks any gendered critiques of Mary. Although he depicts her negatively, this had more to do with her policies than with her sex. This is likely due to the play's close proximity to Elizabeth's reign. By the end of Elizabeth's reign, most scholars accepted female rule in extraordinary circumstances, as female rule was preferable to the chaos and anarchy of ignoring inheritance laws<sup>37</sup>. Therefore, Heywood could not critique Mary's gender without also critiquing the gender and reign of Elizabeth, whose death occurred just a few years before the publication of Heywood's play. Her popularity in this time period would have prevented him from such a critique, and therefore his negative portrayal of Mary lacks the sexist critiques she received during her rule, and her historiography would continue to receive in the subsequent histories.

Over two centuries after Thomas Heywood published his play, another play starring Queen Mary I emerged, Alfred Tennyson's *Queen Mary*. Despite the long length of time between the two plays, little changed in terms of Mary's portrayal. Mary's historiography in the nineteenth century differed little from seventeenth century ideas, and therefore her depiction in popular culture also remained constant. Like Heywood, Tennyson ultimately depicts Mary in a negative light, following the characterization promoted by his contemporary historians. However, Tennyson chooses to emphasize different negative qualities in Mary, which reflect his own contemporary views. While Heywood portrayed Mary as a strong but cruel ruler,

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<sup>37</sup> Judith Richards. "To Promote a Woman to Beare Rule: Talking of Queens in Mid-Tudor England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1 (1997): 120.

Tennyson's Mary shows more gendered stereotypes, as Mary is depicted as a weak woman who cares more for her husband than her country. Despite this major characterization difference, Tennyson's interpretation of Mary includes her cruel actions against alleged heretics and her unpopular Catholic policies, similarly to Heywood. While interpretations of Mary's personality seem to have shifted over the centuries, Tennyson's play shows that history remains united against Mary's perceived crimes, as she continues to be condemned by both historians and writers.

The major difference between Heywood's interpretation of Mary and Tennyson's is strength. Tennyson portrays Mary as a weak ruler, willing to be coerced into policies that affect England negatively. This is shown through her obsession with her marriage, to the detriment of her citizens, and her over-reliance on her counselors, most of whom have their own agendas. Tennyson's portrayal of Mary's marriage reflects the gendered historiography of the time, as he depicts her as a weak woman concerned with trivial matters, who needs a husband in order to rule. In the first act of the play, Mary's many advisors are focusing on serious concerns regarding the country, including the new religious policies and potential revolts. Mary's only concern during these scenes is Philip, specifically whether he will find her attractive. While her advisors go in and out of her presence, discussing treaties and various stately affairs, she wonders about Philip, saying "O, my lord to be, My love, for thy sake only. I am eleven years older than he is. But will he care for that?...But love me only: then the bastard sprout, My sister, is far fairer than myself. Will he be drawn to her?<sup>38</sup>" During these scenes, Tennyson depicts

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<sup>38</sup> Alfred Tennyson Tennyson. *Queen Mary*. (London: Macmillan, 1908).

Mary as a jealous and insecure woman, concerned only with her selfish desires rather than the affairs of her nation. Her vanity and sexuality are also over-emphasized, showcasing nineteenth century stereotypes of the oversexualized woman. In addition, Tennyson emphasizes her womanly weakness by having her nearly faint after visiting her counsel, apparently unable physically to deal with such matters.

Tennyson also uses Mary's marriage to highlight her cruelty, although in the opposite way of Heywood. While in Heywood's play, Mary's cruelty contrasted with Philip's kindness, Tennyson depicts Philip as the catalyst for Mary's bloody policies. In the second act, one of Mary's advisors informs her that Philip will not marry her as long as Jane Grey, a possible rival for the crown, remains alive. Previously in the play, Mary refused to execute Jane, saying "She is but a child. We do not kill the child for doing that his father whipt him into doing."<sup>39</sup> However, when the execution becomes necessary in order to gain Philip, Mary does not hesitate in ordering it be done, saying "She shall die. My foes are at my feet, and Philip King."<sup>40</sup> Further in the play, some of Mary's advisors beg her to spare the life of Bishop Gardiner, a Protestant whose kindness, scholarly devotion, and willingness to recant his heresies makes him a sympathetic individual to her counsel. However, Mary refuses to show mercy, stating, "It is God's will. It is the Holy Father's will, and Philip's will, and mine, that he should burn."<sup>41</sup> These examples show Mary's shift in moral principle, as well as highlight Mary's weakness and Philip's negative influence over her.

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<sup>39</sup> Tennyson, *Queen Mary*. 24.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.



Tennyson also highlights Mary's weakness and inability to rule by portraying her as unaware of the goings on of her government, as she is unknowingly taken advantage of by certain advisors and refuses to heed the advice of the other intelligent and noble members of her government. The Imperial ambassador, Renard, and Philip often reveal their true negative feelings about the queen and England, which the queen fails to notice due to her blind love and foolishness. In one scene, Renard urges Philip to act in a more loving way towards Mary, in order to have her support in their wars with France. Philip replies, "Am I to change my manners, Simon Renard, Because these islanders are brutal beasts? Or would you have me turn a sonneteer, and warbler those brief-sighted eyes of hers?<sup>42</sup>" This scene emphasizes the falseness of Renard and Philip, although Mary never realizes their true intentions. The audience continues to see Mary sacrificing for Philip's desires, namely his war with France, while he speaks of her disparagingly and cares only for the political benefits she brings to him. This leads Mary to become a more pathetic and helpless ruler in the audience's eyes.

This theme continues as Mary not only accepts the advice of bad advisors, but also ignores the advice of those she should heed. This is shown through the arguments of two of the queen's advisors, Paget and Gardiner. Gardiner advocates for the harsh executions of Protestants, and reveals his true love of violence to the audience by saying, "But so I get the laws of the heretic, Spite of Lord Paget and Lord William Howard, And others of our Parliament, revived, I will show fire on my side – stake and fire – sharp work and short. The knaves are easily cowed.<sup>43</sup>" Mary follows Gardiner's violent policies, despite the advice of more merciful

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<sup>42</sup> Tennyson, *Queen Mary*. 99.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

advisors like Paget, who insists, "To take the lives of others that are loyal, And by the churchman's pitiless doom of fire, Were but a thankless policy in the crown, Ay, and against itself.<sup>44</sup>" Tennyson shows Mary's inability to tell good advice from bad, to tell allies from enemies, and the results of her ignorance are disastrous for the citizens of her country.

Tennyson's portrayal of Mary Tudor displays many negative qualities that historiography had emphasized for centuries: her lack of leadership, love of foreign advice, womanly weaknesses, and cruelty. Unlike previous depictions, Tennyson's Mary is not a strong and cruel leader, but rather a weak woman unable to understand what is best for her country. This reflects a more gendered analysis than Heywood's play. Unlike Heywood, Tennyson emphasizes Mary's stereotypical feminine qualities and how these make her a poor ruler. Tennyson's play, which he published in 1875, reflects the Victorian gender ideology of the time. Victorian ideology supported life in the domestic sphere for women, and even Queen Victoria emphasized her role as wife and mother, and preferred her role in the domestic sphere<sup>45</sup>. This gives context to Tennyson's work, which showcases Mary as physically weak, obsessed with attractiveness and sexual desires, and easily manipulated, all stereotypical feminine traits of the time period. In this way, Mary's cultural image has changed since Heywood's portrayal, which did not emphasize gender. However, the continual theme of a declining Marian England, as a direct result of Mary's government, remains. Mary's historiography changed little in the time period between the two plays, and although each emphasized different characteristics of Mary's personality and reign, both ultimately supported the negative narrative.

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<sup>44</sup> Tennyson, *Queen Mary*. 83.

<sup>45</sup> Charles Beem. *The Lioness Roared: The Problems of Female Rule in English History*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008). 164.



A century after Tennyson's play, 20<sup>th</sup> century historians began to revise Mary's historiography, and a more sympathetic portrayal of Mary as a character appears in historical fiction. One example of a positive portrayal of Mary in modern historical fiction is Philippa Gregory's *The Queen's Fool*. Similarly to the historiography emerging at the time, Gregory's novel emphasizes Mary's childhood suffering and religious devotion, and how these contributed to her governmental decisions. Also similar to many modern revisionist historians, Gregory's novel acknowledges the horrors of the Marian burnings, but attempts to justify these acts by highlighting contemporary beliefs about heresy. By using the revisionist themes popularized by modern historians, Gregory characterizes Mary as a devoted ruler whose morality outweighs her mistakes.

From the very beginning of the novel, Gregory emphasizes the suffering Mary experienced in her adolescence. The narrator describes Mary as "...the beloved daughter of the king who had been put aside on the word of Anne Boleyn, the whore. The princess who had been forbidden to see her dying mother...she had endured a life which would have broken most women.<sup>46</sup>" The theme of Mary as the victim of her father and stepmother reoccurs throughout the novel, emphasizing especially the separation from her mother. One character blames Mary's ill health, another controversial subject for many historians, on these past sufferings, saying "The princess was near to death and they would not let her see her mother. The queen could not come to her for fear of never being allowed back to her own court. The Boleyn woman and the king destroyed the two of them: mother and daughter...Ever since then she has

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<sup>46</sup> Philippa Gregory. *The Queen's Fool*. (New York: Touchstone Publishing, 2004). 40.

been tormented by these pains.<sup>47</sup> These statements emphasize the large extent to which Mary remains affected by her parents' divorce, and constantly remind the audience of what she went through. Furthermore, Gregory uses these statements to explain the negative aspects of Mary's life, in this case that she experiences ill health due to the poor treatment, and casts blame upon the king and Anne Boleyn for this consequence. This justification and blame remains a central quality of the novel. By casting Mary as the victim and her father and stepmother as the perpetrators, Gregory seeks to justify certain decisions in Mary's reign, such as her foreign entanglements and the Marian burnings, and cast the blame on others.

Gregory uses the victimization to justify some of Mary's more controversial decisions, such as her Spanish marriage, which was condemned by many historians and writers. In the novel, Mary states "I don't know how to be a queen without a husband by my side. I have never known a queen without a man to guide her. And yet I am so afraid of marrying...I am not a woman who finds it easy to trust men."<sup>48</sup> This statement justifies Mary's decision to marry Philip of Spain. She highlights the horrors of marriage she has seen in her past, her father's abandonment of her mother, by stating she finds it hard to marry due to a lack of trust in men. However, these feelings conflict with expected gender norms, leaving a frustrated and confused Mary. This account reminds the audience that Mary has a primarily negative association with marriage due to her past, emphasizing again her role as a victim and invoking pity in the audience. This statement also indirectly blames her father for her decision, as he is the reason she cannot trust any man save the Emperor, who encourages her to marry Philip. Mary goes on

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<sup>47</sup> Gregory, *The Queen's Fool*. 77.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 135.



to state, "I will marry this Philip of Spain without love, without desire, but with a very true sense that it is what this country needs. He will bring us the wealth and the power of Spain, he will make this country a part of the empire...he will help me restore this country to the discipline of the true church, and he will give me a child to be a godly Christian heir...<sup>49</sup>" This statement contradicts a theory of many historians, that Mary's marriage was impractical and chosen by emotion rather than reason. Instead, Gregory highlights the political benefits a marriage with Spain would bring, and has Mary shrewdly acknowledge and accept these benefits. By portraying Mary as both a victim and a knowledgeable ruler, Gregory conflicts with Mary's past historiography that cites her marriage as evidence of her incompetence.

Gregory continues her positive portrayal of Mary in *The Queen's Fool* by showcasing Mary's religious devotion. The narrator comments on Mary's dedication to her religion, saying "She had a great jeweled cross at her throat as if to flaunt her religion in this most Protestant court, and I thought that she must be either very brave or very reckless to insist on her faith when her brother's men were burning heretics for less.<sup>50</sup>" This emphasizes Mary's bravery and devotion, that she would put herself at risk rather than deny her faith. This religious devotion continues throughout her own reign. From the beginning of Mary's reign, she asserts that God placed her on the throne to do his work. She states, "...this throne was given to me by God...God has sent me to be queen. I shall show His mercy whenever I can. Even to those who know it not.<sup>51</sup>" Mary cites her religious devotion to God as reason for her unwillingness to execute Jane Grey and her associates, despite their involvement in usurping the throne. By

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<sup>49</sup> Gregory, *The Queen's Fool*. 140.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 115.

showcasing Mary's kindness and mercy, rather than the cruel and bloodthirsty Mary portrayed by past historians, Gregory affirms the modern revisionist version of Mary. Mary's religious devotion is cited as the reason for her goodwill and mercy at the beginning of her reign, which contrasts with Gregory's portrayal of a later Mary, whose religious devotion now urges her to commit the Marian burnings. Like many modern historical sources that seek to improve Mary's image, Gregory's depiction of the Marian burnings acknowledges the atrocities committed while defending Mary from being solely to blame and analyzing the policies from a sixteenth-century mindset. Many historians, such as the previously mentioned Judith Richards, emphasized the activity of Mary's officials and their roles in the burnings, in order to relieve Mary of some of the blame.

Contrastingly, Gregory does not focus on Mary's government as sources of blame, but instead emphasizes how the suffering of Mary's past and present led to her decision. The Marian burnings stand in great contrast to the beginning of Mary's reign, when she refused to execute Jane Grey for the plot to usurp the throne. Although there were many political reasons for the historical Mary to avoid executing Jane Grey, as the execution of royalty sets a bad precedent, Gregory's Mary avoids the execution for moral reasons, believing that Jane did not deserve such a harsh punishment. The merciful Mary Gregory depicts at the beginning of the reign contrast with the Mary at the end of the book, who is willing to execute subjects based on religious differences. Through emphasizing this difference, Gregory shows how the negative aspects of rule, especially her false pregnancies and the separation from her husband, leads Mary to believe the burnings are a necessity. As stated in the novel, "The queen has no mother to advise her, no husband who loves her, and no child to distract her. She wants to do right and



she is told by everyone around her that the best way to bring this country to heel is to burn a few nobodies who are destined for hell already. Her heart might ache for them but she will sacrifice them to save the rest...<sup>52</sup>

Gregory also depicts the Marian burnings in light of sixteenth-century religious beliefs. She emphasizes how Mary believed that the burnings were necessary in order to save the country from sin. Mary states, "God must be appeased. Only when this sin is rooted out of the country will I be able to conceive a child and be able to give birth...The wrong that my father started, which my brother continued, has to be reversed...God gives me the strength to do His work, to send sinners to the fires so that the land may be cleansed."<sup>53</sup> Like many revisionist historians, Gregory also emphasizes that the burnings were considered the appropriate punishment for heretics by the church, as Mary states, "This is the law: not a human law, not any law, not my law, but the law of the church. If they do not want to be punished by the church, then they should not sin. I do not set myself up as judge here, it is the church that decides and they must obey it, as I do."<sup>54</sup> Despite these defenses, the novel does not shy away from the horrors of the burnings, as the narrator recounts the painful deaths and how it negatively impacts the country. However, by explaining Mary's mindset regarding the burnings, that they are necessary to save the country and are the required punishment by the church for heresy, Gregory justifies this decision. Unlike fiction based on Protestant histories, Gregory depicts Mary as stubborn and misguided, rather than bloody. The positive portrayal of Mary in

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<sup>52</sup> Gregory, *The Queen's Fool*. 309.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

modern historical fiction, as shown by Gregory's novel, is a direct reflection of the revised historiography Mary received in the late twentieth century.

Like Heywood and Tennyson, Gregory's depiction of Mary also reflects contemporary attitudes of female rule. *The Queen's Fool* does not possess the negativity about female rule of previous centuries. Instead, Gregory portrays Mary from a modern, slightly feminist, perspective. This is shown primarily through Mary's views on marriage. As stated earlier, Gregory depicts Mary's marriage as one chosen for its political advantages, not the desperate and emotional action of a lonely woman, as it had often been portrayed in early centuries. This reflects a modern feminist attitude that single female rulers can make analytical decisions to benefit their country. Furthermore, Mary's lack of trust in men due to her father's poor treatment reflects more modern day thinking. In previous centuries, this poor treatment, when acknowledged, is often blamed on Anne Boleyn, rather than the male ruler. Gregory's novel has Mary acknowledging her father's mistakes and their effects on her, which likely would not have occurred in the sixteenth century. Gregory's Mary displays little of the internalized sexism that the historical Mary likely would have accepted as truth, likely because this would not have appealed to a modern-day audience. Ultimately, like Tennyson and Heywood, Gregory writes for a contemporary audience. While she attempts to remain accurate with the sixteenth century gender roles, portraying a helpless and internally sexist Mary would not align with modern day ideals, and therefore she creates a strong, more politically shrewd Mary.

Ultimately, Mary's historiography allows for various depictions of the first queen of England. Historians like Foxe and Loades vilify her and condemn her reign, leading to portrayals in popular culture like the plays by Tennyson and Heywood. Contrastingly, other historians label



her more positively, with Tittler calling her reign a success and Richards focusing on her uphill battle as a female ruler, leading to a more sympathetic portrayal in Gregory's novel. Ultimately, it is clear that historians and authors write not for accuracy, but for their contemporary audiences, blurring the historical Mary and creating multiple characterizations. These many different versions of Mary suggest there remains a great deal of research and analysis to be done on her reign. For now, it is likely that historians who contextualize Mary's reign, like Richards, have the most accurate account. Not Foxes' villainous tyrant and not Tittler's overlooked martyr, Richard's Mary is somewhere in the middle. Richards emphasizes Mary's actions lined up with sixteenth century values, and focuses on how her gender affected her reign. These are the two major missing elements of Mary's historiography. Mary mistakes, such as her foreign marriage or the Marian burnings, are not the result of cruelty, but rather a misguided attempt to benefit the country, based on contemporary beliefs about single female rulers and the appropriate punishment for heretics. In order to understand Mary's actions as queen and evaluate her reign, scholars must take into account her varied historiography and public image, and how this has affected the study of her reign for the last five centuries.

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